

# Facts About Cervical Cancer

## What is Cervical Cancer?

Cervical cancer starts when cells within the cervix grow out of control.

## Did You Know?

- ▶ Embarrassment is one of the major causes of not getting tested for cervical cancer.
- ▶ Even though women may feel something is wrong, they may not seek help due to fear.
- ▶ Men have a very important role to play in cervical health. Their support is critical. Many women need encouragement to get their routine screenings
- ▶ Most cases of cervical cancer are caused by infection with HPV, a sexually transmitted virus that enters cervical cells and can cause them to change.
- ▶ There are 12,000 new cervical cancers diagnosed in the U.S. per year.
- ▶ There are over 3,500 preventable deaths from cervical cancer each year.
- ▶ In the United States, Hispanic women are most likely to get cervical cancer, followed by African-Americans, Asians and Pacific Islanders, and Caucasians. American Indians and Alaskan natives have the lowest risk of cervical cancer in this country.

**In most cases, problems can be prevented through early detection and treatment before cancer develops!**



# Key Terms Related to Your Cervical Health

If you aren't sure what a word means, please ask!

## Key Terms

- ▶ **Cervix:** The cervix is the part of the female reproductive system that connects the uterus (womb) to the vagina. It is made up of strong muscles and it functions like a tunnel, allowing the flow of menstrual blood (your monthly period) from the uterus into the vagina and directs sperm into the uterus during intercourse.
- ▶ **Endometrium:** The endometrium is the tissue lining the inner cavity of the uterus (or womb). In women of childbearing age, this inner layer of the uterus goes through a series of monthly changes known as the menstrual cycle.
- ▶ **Fallopian Tubes:** The pair of tubes along which eggs travel from the ovaries to the uterus.
- ▶ **Myometrium:** The smooth muscle tissue of the uterus.
- ▶ **Ovaries:** Where ova or eggs are produced.
- ▶ **Uterus:** A hollow, pear-shaped organ that is located in a woman's lower abdomen, between the bladder and the rectum. It is the organ where a fetus grows until birth.
- ▶ **Vagina:** the muscular and tubular part of the female genital tract, which in humans extends from the vulva to the cervix.
- ▶ **Vulva:** The external female genital area.

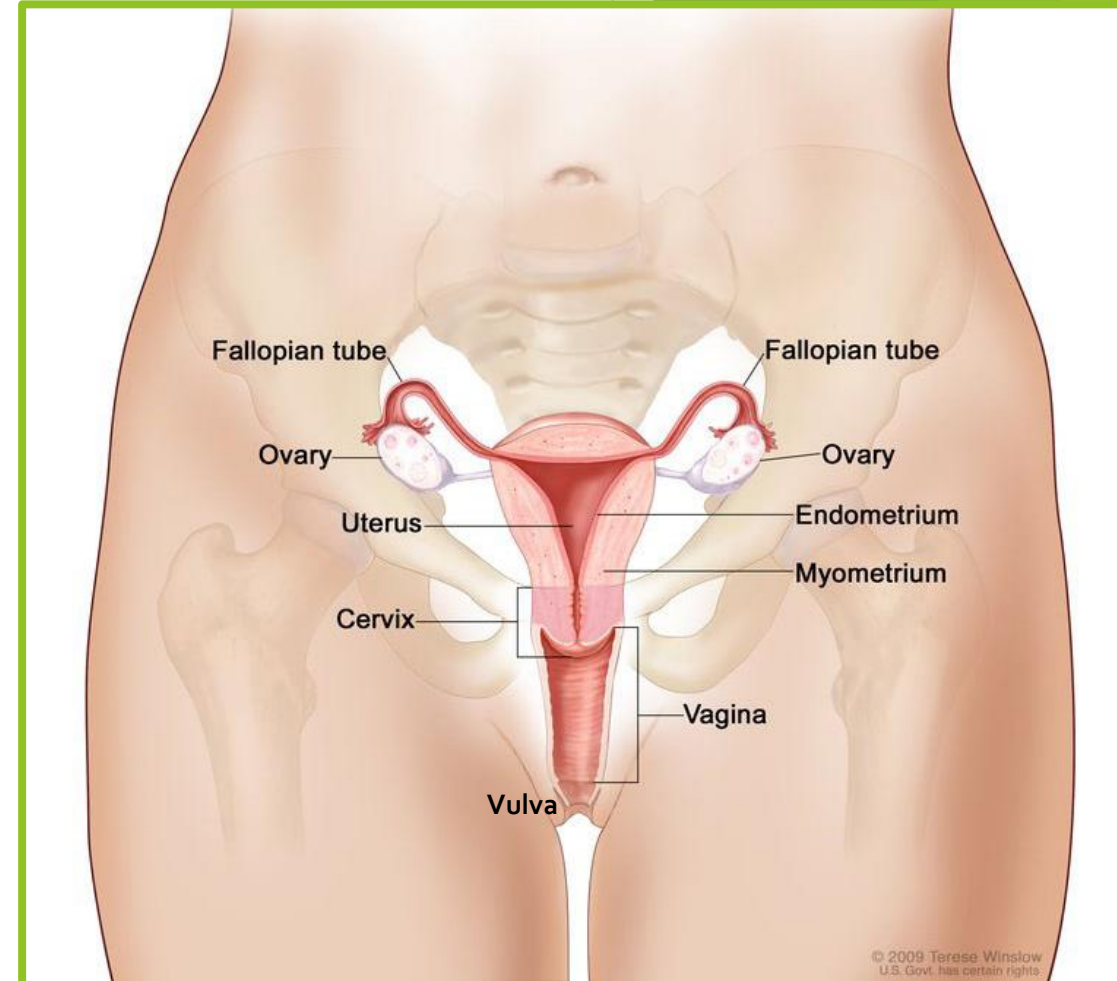


Image source: <https://www.cancer.gov/types/cervical/understanding-cervical-changes>

# Pelvic Exams and Pap Tests Save Lives!

## The pelvic exam has three parts:

1. Looking at the vulva.
2. Looking at the vagina and cervix with a speculum.
3. Checking the internal organs.

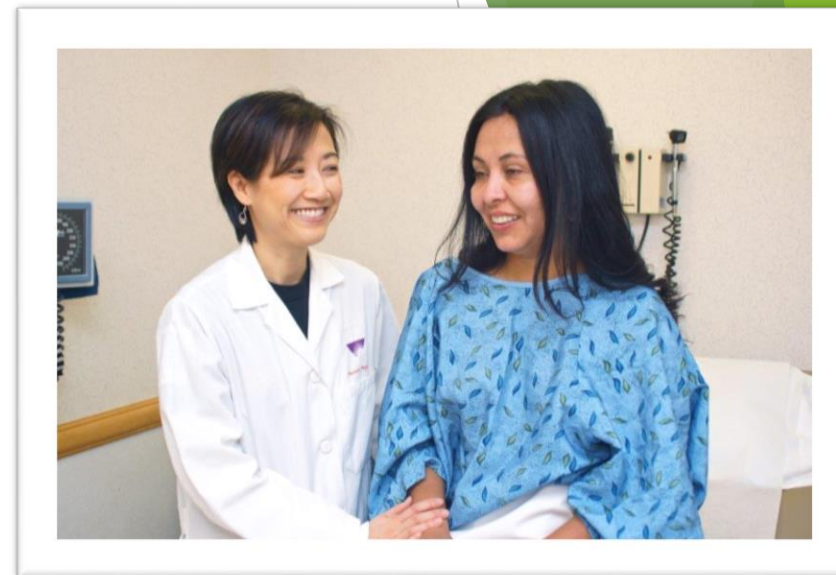
## A Pap test checks for abnormal changes in the cervix that could lead to cancer.

During a Pap test, a sample of cells is taken from your cervix with a small brush and examined under a microscope.

*An abnormal test result does not mean you have cancer.* Women with abnormal Pap test results are usually examined further.

## Your health care team is here to make you comfortable!

Please tell your Doctor if something frightens or bothers you or if you are not sure what something means.



## Cervical Care Glossary

**Colposcopy:** This gives your Doctor a better look at your cervix using an instrument called a colposcope to shine a light on your cervix and magnify it. If an abnormal area is seen, a biopsy will be done.

**Hysterectomy:** Removal of the uterus.

**Loop electrosurgical excision procedure (LEEP)**—A thin wire loop that carries an electric current remove abnormal areas of the cervix.

**Conization:** A cone-shaped piece of the cervix that contains the abnormal cells is removed.

# Signs of Cervical Cancer

**Note: Women with early cervical cancers and pre-cancers usually have no symptoms!**

*That is why regularly scheduled exams are essential, so be sure to get a well woman exam once a year.*

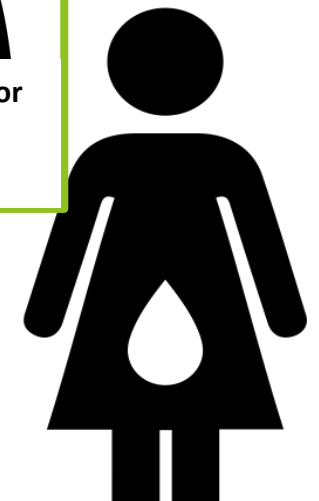
Remember...cervical cancer starts when cells within the cervix grow out of control.

**Symptoms often do not begin until the cancer grows into nearby tissue.**

When this happens, common symptoms are:

- Abnormal bleeding
- Pelvic pain not related to your menstrual cycle
- Heavy or unusual discharge that may be watery, thick, and possibly have a bad odor
- Increased urinary frequency
- Pain during urination or difficulty urinating

**If you ever do have any of these symptoms, please see a health care professional right away.**



Abnormal bleeding or unusual discharge from the vagina

# Types of Cervical Cancer

The most common type of cervical cancer is *squamous cell carcinoma*.

- ▶ Squamous cells are thin, flat cells that look like fish scales, and are found in the tissue that forms the surface of the skin.
- ▶ The squamous cells right at the entry of the cervix, at the outermost layer of the skin, are most susceptible to *human papilloma virus* (HPV).
- ▶ This is why we do the Pap test and will discuss your test results with you.

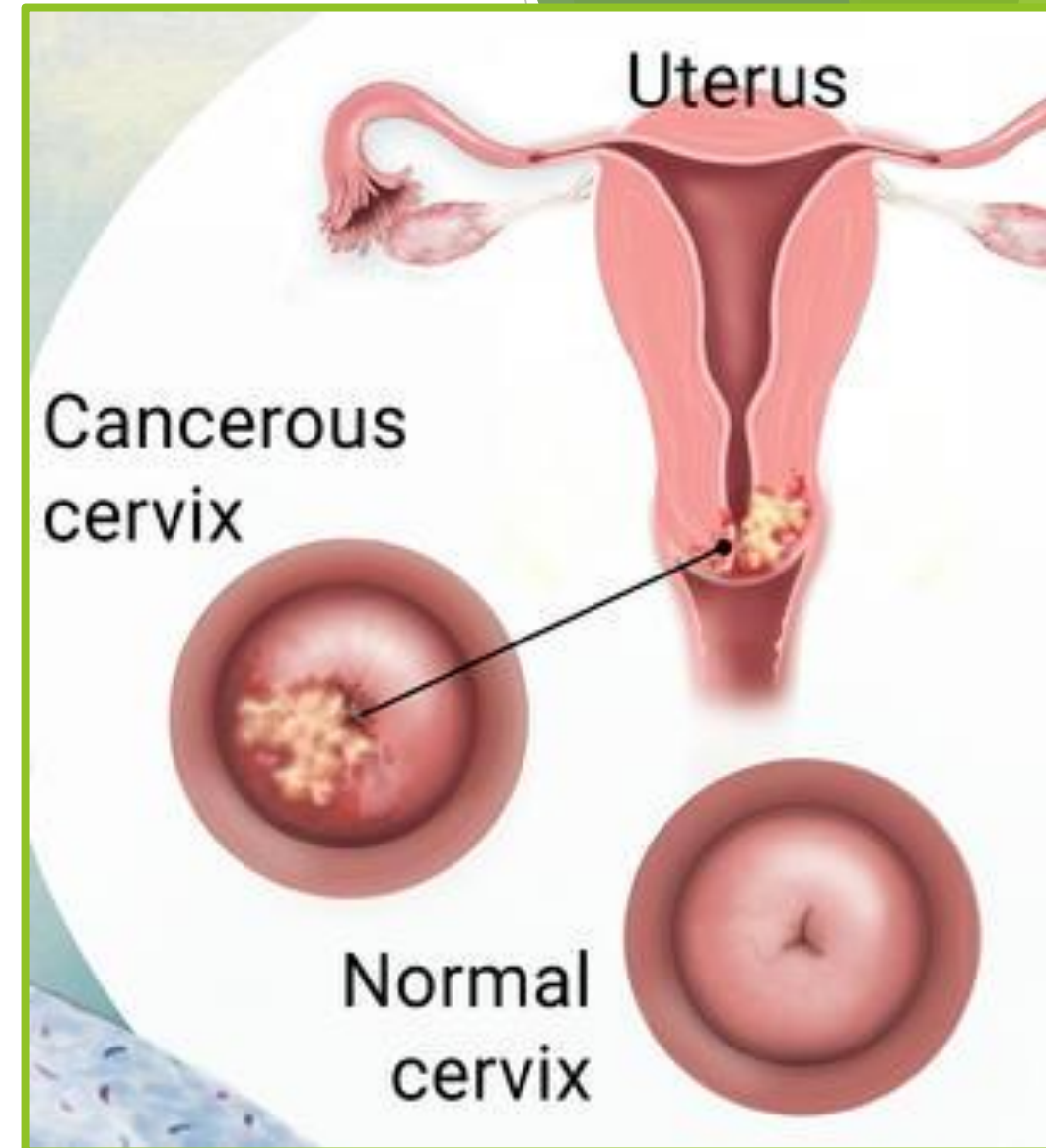


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# Facts About Cervical Cancer

By age 50, at least 80% of women will have acquired human papillomavirus, also known as HPV.

- ▶ Men can pass to women and women can pass it to men.
- ▶ Most people with HPV show no symptoms.
- ▶ In most cases HPV goes away, but women with persistent HPV are at risk for developing cancer.

## What Can You Do for Your Cervical Health?

- ▶ A Pap test is recommended starting at age 21.
- ▶ Women aged 21–29 years should have a Pap test alone every 3 years.
- ▶ Women aged 30–65 years should have a Pap test and an HPV test (co-testing) every 5 years. It is acceptable to have a Pap test alone every 3 years.
- ▶ Women who have a history of cervical cancer, are infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), have a weakened immune system, or who were exposed to diethylstilbestrol (DES) before birth may require more frequent screening.

Talk to your Doctor today about the Pap test and HPV screening!



### An Important Note about HPV

HPV is not the same as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV, which causes AIDS) or herpes simplex virus (HSV, which causes cold sores and genital herpes).



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